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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 002434

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: EXPAT OIL WORKERS KIDNAPPED IN NIGER DELTA -- MORE TO COME?

Classified By: J GREGOIRE FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

1. (SBU) On Thursday, November 27, seven expatriates were kidnapped in Nigeria's Niger Delta region. One has escaped or has been released. No American citizens appear to be involved.

2. (CO) The seven expatriate employees of the Canadian pipe-coating company Bredero Shaw were kidnapped off a boat near Warri (they reportedly hail from Britain, Australia, Russia and possibly Brazil and/or Colombia). An oil company security manager reported that the kidnappers are Ijaw, who released one hostage. On November 28, Econoff was informed of the kidnapping by Frank Omare, Special Assistant to the Governor of Delta State, where Warri is located. Omare is one of several new special assistants of Ijaw ethnicity Governor James Ibori appointed to assist the Delta State Security Council react to violence in the Warri region. (Some speculate that Ibori has made Ijaw appointments to his circle of advisors as a way to increasingly factionalize the various Ijaw militant groups.) Omare noted one of the hostages escaped. Omare told Econoff that the Nigerian Navy had "seized suspected points" along the waterways, but he could not elaborate on that statement at that moment. He said he was on his way from Asaba to Warri to assist in the release of the remaining hostages.

3. (CO) Also on November 28, Dudley McDaniel, Operational Manager for Chevron's Escravos oil terminal and tank farm, told Econoff that he was informed that the kidnappings took place as the workers were practicing a water evacuation drill from their Warri facilities. McDaniel said one of the kidnapped crew escaped on Friday, November 28, and reported that the victims were hooded and transported to an unknown location by boat, and that the trip took approximately two hours. McDaniels also said the Navy and other elements of Operation Restore Hope have stepped up patrols and were taking steps to intercede in the kidnappings.

4. (CO) This event highlights a sudden upsurge in kidnappings in the Delta region during the month of November (septel). This week, a Halliburton security manager sent an inquiry to the general security community asking for corroboration of a report that criminal elements in the swamp regions are planning multiple actions across the Delta during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) scheduled for the first week of December in Abuja. The report, considered credible by the source, indicated that the goal of the actions would be to shut down all oil production from the Delta during the CHOGM, which is to be highlighted by a visit from the Queen of England.

5. (CO) Chevron's McDaniel told Econoff that he was aware of no specific threat as described above. He did say that perhaps in preparation for the CHOGM activities, the Nigerian Navy has been conducting exercises in and around the Escravos/Warri area this week. He noted an impressive display and use of three former buoy tenders given the GON by the USG earlier this year, and that the Navy used a Chevron floating rig to practice assaults and hostage release scenarios. He said the troops appeared well organized and capable.

6. (CO) COMMENT: We have no corroboration of the report that mass action will take place in the Delta in conjunction with CHOGM. The Delta "criminal elements" are factionalized among ethnic groups and even within ethnic groups. The region is plagued by simple bandits and robbers, illegal oil bunkerers and pirates, whose financial and political interests differ greatly, making it difficult to foresee an organized attempt at massive disruption. However, it is possible that an Ijaw umbrella group could spread the word that it is encouraging action of some kind during the CHOGM, thus leading to several, if not many, independent incidents of banditry, vandalism and/or kidnapping. This would pose a far more difficult scenario for the GON -- or the instigators -- to contain once under way. END COMMENT.

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